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EXTERNSHIP: AI 257 Ireland: Land, History, People, Art

Competence Statements:

L-10: Can reflect on the learning process and methods used in an experiential project.

L-11: Can analyze and expand one's learning style by correlating experience with the ability to effectively adapt to new learning.

## Green

### Introduction

The Kolb Learning Style Inventory suggests that I have a *Converging* learning style, which I can relate to. My initial educated guess was that I had an *Accommodating* learning style because I do prefer hands-on participation, so the results somewhat surprised me. I would like to create new ways of thinking and doing, as that would obviously benefit my efficiency in everything that I do. Despite being designated as a *Converger*, my kite-shaped pattern is fairly balanced on the Learning Cycle and my Learning Grid position is near the center. In other words, I partake mostly in active experimentation and abstract conceptualization, yet utilize reflective observation and concrete experience. Basically, I am a doer and thinker, but also learn by means of reflecting and experiencing. Cogitating on the learning process and methods used in an experiential project, externship will give me an opportunity to focus on the particular dynamic of learning from direct experience in new situations (i.e., Ireland travel course). I will push myself to define and to expand my learning style, to learn about something with which I do not have much experience, and to familiarize myself with my ability to successfully adapt to new learning.

### The Converger

Though I do not always like it, I embrace self-assessment. Living means learning and the love that my family shared provided a solid foundation for me to springboard off of. Not only did they provide tools for success, but taught me the importance of learning from my mistakes. That groundwork has vaulted me to where I am today and life experiences continue to shape my infrastructure. But how does that criterion relate to my *Converging* learning style and what are

the strengths I see in this kind of learning? In answering the aforementioned question, I will give five examples of how I have used my learning style effectively.

My passion for sports emerged at a young age and ignited a fire inside! Unfortunately, aggressive behavior and growth spurts do not always mesh well, which led to some clumsy accidents and three sets of facial stitches in a year's time. Although I was only about five years old, I can remember the emergency room like it was yesterday. Consequently, I developed an abnormal fear of blood known as hemophobia, which continues to adversely affect my life. Health classes in school were very difficult because I often had to go to the library during any discussion pertaining to blood. I actually fainted in kindergarten one time when another student's parent was asked to speak to the class about her pacemaker procedure. As the years have passed, I have been able to identify the indicators that bring on woozy feelings and I can now effectively remove myself from the catalysts, which speaks to the strength of my ability to solve problems as a *Converger*. Working in the medical field is still not an option for me though because there are too many negative stimulants for me to constantly handle. As a scholastic sports coach in Oregon, I am required to have formal First-Aid and CPR training. Thankfully, I have been able to control my conditional response by notifying the instructor of my phobia in advance. If need be, I can leave the room to gather myself and then makeup anything that I may miss. Gratefully, I have also learned to use the benefits of adrenaline to assist others in emergency type situations. If I am really concerned about others then my mind does not have the time to conjure up my anxiety disorder. Though I may pass out when the distress is over, at least I can assist during the crisis. On the whole, I have defined the problem behind my phobia, but sadly, I have yet to effectively resolve the issue and that is frustrating to say the least. I need to experiment with new resolutions.

As a first grade student, I struggled with reading. The teacher and my parents determined that I should get reading assistance via in-school tutoring sessions. At first, I rejected the notion because it cut into my activity time at school. Working on reading for thirty minutes every day is a pretty big deal to a young elementary aged kid and I considered the whole process to be no fun. Needless to say, I lost that early battle, but would later win the war by way of becoming a better reader. Third grade was the last time that I needed tutorial reading help and I was able to hit the ground running the following academic year. Although my reading skills had improved significantly by the fourth grade, I began to have trouble spelling more advanced words because they sounded phonetically different from how they are actually spelled. There are times in life when using specified methods to improve in one aspect can be a detrimental to another, but making decisions to improve your self is worth the fight. Fortunately, I was able to advance my spelling skills by consistently studying teacher assigned word sets with my parents. By the time sixth grade rolled around, I went from being a very poor speller to being one of the best in my classroom. There is very little chance that I would have been successful in school or have the ability to successfully write this journal if others would not have made the effort to reach out to me. A *Diverging* learning style exhibits strength in understanding people, but it is also a vital aspect of a *Converger's* reasoning process.

Athletics have influenced my life, especially in the years before I turned twenty. Although I am most passionate about football, I have participated in a multitude of different sporting activities. When I struggled scholastically during my elementary aged years, athletics provided a constructive outlet for venting. The school playground became a place that I could rebuild any confidence that may have been lost when class was in session. Being able to quickly adapt to various athletic fundamentals gave me an early advantage on the competition, as did the

ability to focus my aggression. As I have already mentioned, I grew quickly and that afforded me physical prowess over most everybody else in elementary school. Bullying has never been my style, but I have always competed to win in events where the score is being kept. My parents and the many people that coached me throughout the years taught me to not only win with class but lose with grace. I have always believed that there is more to learn from losing than what is maintained by winning. With the passing years came the importance of mental toughness, enabling me to retain athletic adroitness. Moreover, maintaining good grades was mandatory in my pursuit of being a scholar/athlete, which helped me garner scholastic and athletic awards. Being a successful student and/or athlete requires dedication, systematic planning, and the ability to positively influence people and events through action (i.e., *Converging* characteristics).

Two weeks after I graduated from high school, a man who worked with my father died from affixation while on the job. In no way was my dad responsible for the man's death, but he tragically took on that burden since the man was his subordinate. Subsequently, my father fell into a deep depression and despite family and professional assistance, committed suicide within a year's time. Although I had accepted a partial academic/athletic scholarship from Pacific Lutheran University (PLU), I decided that it was best for me to stay close to home after my dad became despondent. I attended Central Oregon Community College during the year leading up to my father's death and I am fortunate to have made that decision. If I had gone away to PLU then I would have never gotten the chance to be with him during that time. Although I was again offered scholastic/athletic scholarships to four year colleges the following year, my priorities had been abruptly altered and my life was in distress. Never before had anyone I loved died and my response was acrimonious. Even though I was able to complete my studies at COCC that year, fifteen years passed before I would complete another college course. I believed that it was

important for me to make my own money rather than depend on my mother financially. She had her own worries and I did not want to further encumber her with having to support me. In turn, I joined the workforce in search of a consistent income. Unfortunately, I also began to slowly slip into a depressive state that would take me two and a half years to overcome. Not only was my dad gone, but the confidence boost that I had always garnered from athletics was missing. Mercifully, I realized that my life was amiss and got some psychological assistance. An important part of my recovery was learning about mental illness so that I could better understand what had stricken my father. Reading various articles by psychologists and psychiatrists taught me that there are many different types of depression. Mental illness is difficult to treat because each diagnosis is unique. The brain is extremely complex and although advanced research has produced successful treatment results, it has also created more questions. Even bad experiences are beneficial if we choose to learn from them. I am grateful for acting on an intellectual understanding of a situation, which is a *Converging* learning style facet, and knowing when I needed to reach out for assistance.

As a Project Manager, I do try my best to find practical uses for ideas and theories. Solving problems by finding solutions is basically what I do for a living. I do not mind experimenting with new ideas as long as I am able to maintain situational control. I am not willing to sacrifice people's values because there are ultimately many ways to accomplish tasks by way of reasoning. For all intents and purposes, I choose to treat people with respect because that is the way I want to be treated. Although my work ethic has afforded me promotions, job advancement can only mask my regret of not having a degree. I have wanted to be an educator since adolescence and I am logically taking the best course of action to achieve my goals. In

essence, I am planning to converge on the most viable educational and professional solution available.

In my opinion, the biggest strengths that I see in the *Converging* learning style are practicality, logic, reasoning, task management, and leadership. Together, those elements facilitate thinking and doing. In reflection, my passion for sports, fear of blood, problems with reading as a child, bout with depression after my dad's death, and becoming self sufficient embody participatory occurrences that have created who I am today. There is still much work to be done though and I will put forth the effort to expand my learning style to include more aspects of *Accommodating*, *Diverging*, and *Assimilating*, which should definitely benefit me in the future.

## Exploration

While in Ireland, I will be exploring the country's land, history, people, and art with a focus on the Gaelic Athletic Association, most notably Gaelic Football. Whether Externship or other competences, I understand the attribute of being flexible in terms of adapting to situational learning. Obviously, strengthening and developing my learning style necessitates that I develop a long term plan, practice new skills, and associate with people whose learning styles are different from my own, but that is easier said than done. As duly noted by my Ireland travel course professor, "*Convergers* like myself, prefer to get things done efficiently and have them stay done!" That statement definitely resonates in my approach towards work and education. By holding up the learning opportunity to the experience in which I am engaging, I will assuredly be afforded the fortuity to learn how something as seemingly trivial as sports can have an important historical and cultural impact on a nation.

Other than being a huge sports fan that enjoys advancing my knowledge about various types of athletic activities around the world, I only know the surface aspects of Gaelic Football and the organization that governs the sport, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). About a year and a half ago, a former coworker of mine lent me a video tape with Gaelic Football game footage on it and I studied the basics of play. Since that time, I have mulled over the [GAA](#) website and have familiarized myself with the rules of the game. Amazingly, the GAA is celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, equating to it being just a bit younger than Major League Baseball's National League (1876). Along with Gaelic Football, which is Ireland's most popular spectator sport, the GAA sponsors three other sports: Hurling, Handball, and Rounders. Gaelic Football is a physical sport that requires dexterity skill and is played by teams of fifteen on a rectangular grass pitch with H-shaped goals at each end. The primary objective is to score by kicking or striking the ball with the hand and getting it through the goals. Players advance the ball up the field with a combination of carrying, called soloing (dropping and then toe-kicking the ball upward into the hands), kicking, and hand-passing to their teammates. Like most other team sports, the club with the highest score at the end of the match wins.

With only a fundamental apprehension of Gaelic Football and the GAA, I plan to increase my knowledge on the interrelatedness of the entities to Irish culture and history. A pre trip interview with my Ireland travel course professor not only made me aware of the connectedness between Ireland's liberation and the GAA, but also set the tone for the experiential adventure. As I will discuss in detail later, a lecture by sports commentator Micheal O'Muircheartaigh has been circled on my itinerary and I look forward to his discussion on the founding of the GAA as part of a nationalistic effort that ultimately led to Ireland's independence from Britain. Hopefully, I can take from that dialog a basis of information in which to further



build upon. Nevertheless, I am confident in my ability, especially when it comes to something that really interests me, to efficiently and effectively grasp the subject.

## New Learning

The very first line in the DePaul University School of New Learning's mission statement includes the following, "Is a college designed particularly for adults." That avowal represents me and all the other students experiencing the Ireland travel course. I feel secure knowing that one of the eight essential commitments of the School for New Learning (SNL) is an obligation to adult knowledge. Although I have always believed that lifelong learning is essential, I must truly embrace that philosophy. If SNL is committed to evolving then I should make a similar pledge to myself. I am going to make that conscious choice because I want to!

What exactly is competence? That question appears to be eluding me because I continue to erroneously define its meaning. In SNL terms, I would have to say that possessing sufficient comprehension in a specified capacity defines competence. According to my Ireland travel course instructor, "Competence also means transferrable learning, something that can be applied in other contexts." I need to actively apply her elucidation during the erudition process. Competence is different than content, but wrapping my mind around that notion has not been easy. What I do know is that SNL's "I can" concept is invigorating and has afforded me the benefits of new understanding when it comes to what I have learned in the past. That new way of thinking will also guide me in my future endeavors at DePaul and beyond.

I need and want to be open to all information because everything will relate to my professional success in one way or another. I have an outline of what it is going to take to realize my professional goals, but there will be circumstances that arise. Being flexible with the mold is

a must, so structuring with playdoh is better than cement in this case, which can be an arduous adjustment for a *Converger* like me. As a matter of fact, only after doing the Kolb Learning Style Inventory exercise did I realize that maybe it is true that I would rather deal with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues. I want to become a teacher and believe that my communication skills are very good, especially since I am employed as a manager at my current job, but it is possible that dealing with conflicting personalities is something that I need to improve at. What I do know is that I have a great opportunity to excel!

As far as my expectations of what I will learn while in Ireland, I think that I will gain knowledge about a variety of things that I am not even expecting to. That is not a bad thing by any means, as I want to allow myself to be admissible to new learning. In reality, this could be the last time that I ever visit Ireland, although I hope that it is not. Conventional wisdom has it that nothing is guaranteed in life, so I must take in all that I can and appreciate the opportunity before me. Having to select another learning approach opposite of my normal *Converging* style somewhat concerns me because of the unfamiliar environment that I will be in, but I am confident in my ability to adjust to a *Diverging* learning style. Change does not constitute that I purge my regular method; instead, I will try to immerse myself in another learning technique.

Although my initial reactions to the idea of learning primarily in a *Diverging* style made me feel a bit overwhelmed and skeptical, positive thinking will allow me to make a smooth transition. As my first order of business, I want to make sure that I embrace an opportunity to improve myself. A negative aspect of normally being a *Converger* is that I typically jump to conclusions without reading and/or hearing all the options. Regrettably, I have likely missed out on some information because of my need to swiftly complete and move on from projects. That approach may profit me at work, but does not equate to complete competence as a student. In

essence, I am in a learning rut. Though I have some scholastic skills, I cannot advance as a learner without strengthening my erudition dexterity.

The primary advantage I can imagine from learning in a *Diverging* way will be that of growing as a learner. As a *Diverger* in training, I hope to be able to not only experiment with innovative ideas, but be able to realistically apply new ways of learning to my life. After all, creating new methods of thinking and doing will benefit me in all facets of life. Even if I were to take just one aspect from the *Diverging* learning style and successfully implement it into my life, I will have expanded my learning skills. Common sense seems to dictate that everyone learns lots of different things in dissimilar situations, which places unique demands on all of us, so what works for someone else may not work for me. With that said, my goal is to improve as a learner, which means that I must take risks. In making a conscious choice to change, taking what works for somebody else can be transformed into something that works for me.

Patience is indeed a virtue, but unfortunately, I do not always make time for it. Then again, there are projects that necessitate urgency, which suits me well as a *Converger*, so understanding what learning style to utilize in any given situation is a plus. There is a certain ease about the *Diverging* learning style that intrigues me. Time seems to be used as an opportunity to gain more knowledge, rather than being viewed as a deadline. Although inefficient at times, the expansive gathering of material can afford me the ability to better choose the best solution instead of quickly selecting the one that will simply work. Whether theoretical or experiential in nature, life is a banquet of information, so imagining the implications of ambiguous situations will allow me to better discern knowledge. In regard to others, being a *Diverger* means listening with an open mind and tuning in to people's feelings. The ability to push conversation while being sensitive to values facilitates further comprehension.

As bad as jumping to conclusions can be, I am sure that there are, at the very least, something's that I do not think of. That cannot be efficient in terms of getting stuff done thoroughly. Although I complete projects, my answers may not be the best ones available. That certainly concerns me because my decisions may have adverse affects on others. As noted earlier, I believe that I am a considerate person, but even a slight miscue could have undesirable ramifications. Viewing situations from many different points of view instead of taking immediate action facilitates alternative possibilities. Furthermore, receiving personal feedback rather than giving it may be a passive approach, but promotes interaction and teamwork. Recognizing problems, brainstorming, and being adaptable and practical are phases of concrete experience and reflective observation that work well with cultural encounters. Assuredly, I can apply those elements during my time in Ireland.

## Design

Getting back to my topic of interest on the Gaelic Athletic Association, markedly Gaelic Football, I have designed multiple learning experiences for myself that utilize the *Diverging* learning style. Obviously, I need to be imaginative because I will be attempting to learn something new in a resourceful manner. While learning, I must be in the moment then remember to reflect on how I felt during the process. Not only will I be garnering knowledge on my subject, but will be evaluating my new learning technique. Taking it all in and analyzing the breadth of information to branch further out may not be an easy task, but is an opportunistic scheme that I plan to embrace.

The Clifden Arts Week program provides a plethora of opportunities to experience adroitness. From Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney to prizewinning harpist Lynn Saoirse, the

annual event, now in its thirty-second year, includes poetry, music, lectures, comedy, visual arts, and theater. Although my initial thought was that my topic of interest on Gaelic Football and the GAA may not be a good fit for arts week, my Ireland travel course instructor explained how interrelatedness works and now I understand how to better use information. There are certainly learning experiences that relate to both my subject and my new learning style, which is *Diverging*, and they are as follows:

One – I am going to watch on television the GAA All-Ireland Gaelic Football championship between County Cork and County Kerry on September 13, 2009. The rivals from Munster will square off once again and I plan to learn more about contest rules and game play. Luckily, the Ireland travel course is in Ireland during this particular time of year; otherwise, I would not have the luxury of being able to watch the game on Irish ground, which should offer up some fervor. For me, reflective observation is something that I want to improve on, which will help me look for the meaning of things. Sports are a great avenue for invoking imagination, so I am pretty excited about the opportunity.

Two – I have an interview with Ira, renowned bodhran (Irish drum) player and Irish nationalist, on September 22, 2009. Simply stated, he appears to have a wealth of knowledge and is quite worldly, so I am very excited to converse with him about the GAA and anything else that he has to offer. Being a *Diverger* in training, I will listen to learn and let free talk reign supreme instead of trying to control the interview, which is what I would likely try to do in my normal *Converging* learning style. Then again, Ira does not seem like the type of person that would simply allow somebody else to dictate flow, especially with his Republican (i.e., IRA) training and all.

Three – On September 24, 2009, I will attend a celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GAA. A talk by Micheal O’Muircheartaigh, Ireland’s most popular sport commentator, should be a perfect fit for what I am looking for in regard to my topic. Understanding people is a *Diverging* characteristic that I need to strengthen and although I have heard that it can be difficult to decipher Micheal’s accent, I hope to be able to buy his book, *From Dun Sion to Croke Park*. This could also be a chance for me to work on my patience, as I usually get frustrated when I cannot clearly decipher what is being stated.

Four – The media factor experiences that relate to my Gaelic Football/GAA topic and my new *Diverging* learning style include television sportscasts, newspaper sports sections, resident interactions, and the internet. In gathering information and speaking with locals, I will remain open minded and allow brainstorming to runneth over. Different situations place different demands on all of us and the Ireland travel course necessitates focal demand. Actively participating as a *Diverger* will afford me the prospect of garnering material that I might have otherwise passed by.

Five – I plan to interview classmate Magenta, who is a *Diverger*. Her tips will assist me on the fundamentals of how to best utilize the *Diverging* learning style. In addition, I will learn the ways Magenta finds her learning method to be helpful and explore circumstances that I think I would find her learning technique useful. Successfully applying what she has to offer in terms of her learning style will make mine better.

## Discovery

What were the results of the learning experiences I planned and executed? In no way did I alter my planned learning experiences, which means that I certainly cannot say that any of them

were bad because I learned something during each occurrence. I assuredly could have learned more from all the experiences by asking more questions, but monopolizing the forums, even if there was a chance, would have been intrusive. Whether a lecture, gathering, or personal interview people typically say what they want to say and move on. Understanding the setting as a student is just as important as knowing your audience.

The GAA All-Ireland Gaelic Football final was exciting. Although the speed of the game is quick, I easily followed the flow. I must say that I expected there to be a bit more energy in the pub during the contest, but was reminded by a patron of County Galway's absence in the big game. Before the game, I decided to root for County Cork because I have been told by other family members that my heritage may derive from that region of Ireland. Additionally, I find that being indifferent about who wins is boring. Although a *Diverger* would likely not select a side to cheer for when learning about a foreign sport, I think that liveliness, in terms of supporting a team, enhances the learning process. I was still able to observe carefully before making judgments. Despite my preference of learning by doing, I learned a lot about Gaelic Football by watching and listening intently. I asked a couple of onlookers to interpret a few of the rule questions that I had and they provided to the point answers. Being a sports fan myself, I anticipated that their responses would be direct because time spent talking equates to lost concentration on the action. In the end, I was astonished that the championship contest only took about an hour and a half to play. Most American sport organizations could learn a thing or two about commercial management. Then again, the GAA is an amateur organization unlike that of professional sports in America. What country's athletes do you think are playing for the love of the game? I am going with those that do not get paid to play.

The interview with Ira was, to say the least, interesting. As a matter of fact, I am still a bit awestruck by the whole experience. Ira, me, and fellow class member Silver all met at the Clifden square, had a beverage at a local pub, and then headed over to Ira's apartment for the interview. I felt comfortable at Ira's place, which certainly could have had something to do with Silver being there as well. As a *Diverger* in training, I simply allowed Ira to speak. In fact, I only asked a few questions, which were for clarification only. Anticipating our meeting, Ira put together a binder of Gaelic Football/GAA information and photos inside. I was blown away by his generosity and his hospitality was just as gracious. Although we did not discuss Gaelic Football or the GAA that much, I was totally enthralled with the discussion. Ira has so much historical material that he could probably open up a museum. The man is a sportsman, musician, painter, journalist, Republican, nationalist, and a soon to be author. He has really lived! Can I honestly say the same thing about myself? Truth be told, I feel so inconsequential in comparison. I can see how being a product of such a soul wrenching struggle can mold a man. During the interview, I just kept thinking how fortunate I am to have the life that I do. What kind of person would I be today if the circumstances of my life were different? Life is amazing in the sense that people can share similarities, yet be worlds apart.

Micheal O'Muircheartaigh's lecture on the GAA that included a lot of talk about Gaelic Football and Hurling, shed light on the lore of sport in Ireland. Switching between English and Irish language, Micheal, a radio sports commentator, eloquently told stories of yore. With a mesmerizing voice, he drew the audience in and took us on a multitude of journeys. In one way or another, everyone yearns for the glory days and although the sports may be different, the stories are very similar to those in America. The Irish adore their athletics just as much as Americans do and nothing reminded me more of home than the heartfelt expressions and



reflections shared by the sports fans in attendance. Of interest was a conversation that I had with a fan before Micheal spoke. A retired teacher, she spoke of Micheal's influence. As I had done in the Ira interview, I allowed her to speak without interruption. I consciously tuned into her feelings while gathering information. Although I had already assumed that Micheal had legendary status similar to that of National Football League announcer John Madden, I allowed the experience to create a mental model. I attempted to view the lecture from the perspective of being not only an American, but as an Irish sportsman. The occasion was definitely a safe way to practice new skills because nothing in this world makes me feel more comfortable and connected globally than sport.

During my time in Ireland I read many articles on Gaelic Football, especially in regard to the GAA All-Ireland final. The *Irish Examiner* actually published a twenty page championship preview on September 18, 2009. Unfortunately for County Cork, the paper gave them the proverbial kiss of death by proclaiming the following on the front page of the insert: 'Realistically, it's Cork's to lose.' I am positive that County Kerry team members took that page and taped it up on their locker room's chalkboard. Being a former athlete and now a coach, I can definitely say that chalkboard material is a great motivator. Sports are detail orientated and gathering information, whether for advantage or motivation purposes, is a process of attrition, which suits *Divergers* just fine. Regardless of the amount of achievement accrued in athletic competition, performance is imperfect. Knowledge is ever changing and the desire to succeed is never greater than the effort put forth in preparation. In this sense, I can see how a *Diverging* learning style can benefit both coaches and athletes. Being imaginative and the ability to recognize problems are qualities that can be used in training. I want to apply that philosophy to other facets of my life.

In an interview with class member Magenta, who is a *Diverger*, I gained more knowledge of what it is going to take to advance my *Diverging* learning style skills. As I had expected, patience is a fundamental dynamic. Not only does being patient promote learning, but it fosters relationships as well. Relationships, whether personal or business, are inevitable. I can try to be a passerby and not allow connection, but unavoidably, I link, even for just a moment, with all those that I give and/or take something from. A perfect example of relationships exists in the camaraderie among all the Ireland travel class members. We came together for experiential learning, yet our backgrounds are, in most cases, very diverse. Spending time with my classmates helped me through the emerald isle journey and I felt somewhat slighted when I had to be realistic with my time management and choose class work before friendship. I only got to spend a mere ten days with them, but what an experience! Whether I like it or not, normally being a *Converger* meant that I set aside adequate time to work on the Externship journal while in Ireland. Although a *Diverger* might continue to gather information and then attempt to put it all together in one fell swoop, I find that approach to be detrimental. Begrudgingly, most of the group watched an Irish film the night of September 21, 2009, but I passed on the opportunity because there was homework to be done. Hopefully, I did not hurt anyone's feelings. In building relationships, *Divergers* stay positive and do not jump to early conclusions, so I am optimistic that the movie attendees possess that particular attribute.

The ability to both articulate and ramble a bit leads to an inviting persona. Truly listening to learn offers a silence of acceptance. Open conversation quiets tunnel vision and boosts the free writing process. Where I tend to want to make my projects make sense the first time around, a *Diverger*, such as Magenta, might draft and revise much more than I generally do. I can definitely see the benefits of that style, although there are times when time is of the

essence. As much as patience is a vital factor, balance ties the four learning styles (*Diverging, Assimilating, Converging, and Accommodating*) together. Only when balanced can I effectively be efficient at observation. I am certainly respectful of others and their learning styles because there are multiple ways to peel a potato. In other words, there is not one specific way of learning that is best. The one captivating thing that I took from my conversation with Magenta was that life does not occur to plan. Perceptibly, I know that to be true, but it is easy to get lost in the destination, rather than living in the moment.

Being able to give and take constructive criticism is another tip that Magenta presented. Many people assume the previous statement to be a common sense notion, but reevaluating knowledge is a progression in understanding. Much can be lost in just a short period of time and learning is not all about what is new, so refreshers are necessary. With that said, Magenta prefers to lead and provide input just like I do, but where I might be more rigid in application, she bases her response on personality and circumstance. To put it another way, I tend to be more black and white in function; whereas, Magenta incorporates an array of colors in her submission. Without a doubt, I can see the benefits of Magenta's approach. Ultimately, what is at stake here is my ability to learn from a dear peer and constructively apply to my life what I have learned from her.

## Experience

Where do I begin when discussing my learning difficulties? As I mentioned earlier in my journal, I had a tough go of it in elementary school. Socially, things were good, but reading and then spelling were issues for me. Those two problems alone probably created some other erudition issues that I am still unaware of, but needless to say, I was, at the very least, a bit

behind academically. Not until midway through my sophomore year in high school did I realize that I wanted and needed to be a more productive student. Being classified as a jock has its perks, but cliques can be detrimental too. My parents guided and pushed me to perform at my highest level in everything that I did and school was no exception, but if there could have been something or someone else that expected greater things from me academically then maybe I would have taken action earlier. Do not get me wrong, I always got decent grades, but maybe I could have earned better grades, which would have likely helped me perform remarkably on the SAT exam. In no way am I blaming my inability to get into an Ivy League school on anything or anybody else, as it was me who had to ultimately make that conscious change, but why did I not see the light earlier? The only way that I can truly answer that question is to say that life happens.

With my hemophobia, health classes were unbearable as a youth and I simply avoid those types of courses as an adult learner. I realize that blood flows through my body and that my irrational fear is all mental, but that does not change the fact that I have very little tolerance to the ill effects of my reactionary response. Maybe I could have been the best surgeon in the world or figured out how to cure AIDS, but no, I am stricken with fallacies that I will somehow be harmed when others discuss matters pertaining to blood. Even the tightness of a blood pressure cup can make me faint. Talk about a learning difficulty. This is not to say that whenever I go to the doctor that I have reactionary troubles, but I have to make sure that I am mentally prepared. As expected, unforeseen situations cause me the most trouble and others will likely find me scarce in a hurry. I feel like such a wimp! Unfortunately, I am not sure that there is a way of adapting the *Diverging* learning style that will help me overcome my phobia.

In my younger years, I did not embrace advanced mathematics because, to be quite honest, I did not think that the discipline would be applicable in my future. Other than adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing I thought that math was a waste of time. Only now can I look back and realize that my thoughts about mathematics were conditionally *Converging* in nature. Nowadays, I understand the importance of advanced mathematics. When I registered for Quantitative Reasoning for spring term earlier this year I was nervous, but to my surprise, I am decent at math. I aced each of the five exams on the first attempt and learned a great deal about advanced mathematics. That particular experience made me realize just how far I had come as a learner. I specifically remember reading the chapters thoroughly and doing all the practice exercises so that I would be totally prepared for the tests, which is definitely a trait of a *Diverger*. In expanding my erudition skills as an adult learner, I have, in essence, been expanding my learning dexterity throughout my time at DePaul and will continue to aggrandize in the future.

As much as I hate to say this, I have held myself back as a learner. The buck stops here and the person that I look back at in the mirror is the one to blame. I have had every chance in the world to learn, yet I have rarely taken advantage of those opportunities. Now, in my late thirties, I find myself in the throes of formal college schooling. That is probably an extreme declaration, as I really like college, but it would have been much easier to complete all of this learning right after high school. Who is to say that I would have appreciated as much as I do now though? The scope of my journal surely suggests that I am learning a great deal as an SNL student while still having fun. As is evident, I am already applying my new *Diverging* learning style to make me a better learner. I am also absolutely interested in being an active participant in my own life and embracing moments. Learning from specific experiences and then expanding upon them is an aspect of being a *Diverger* that I plan to seize.

In reflecting on my Ireland experience, I found the connectedness of the group, from instructors to students and all things in between, to be inspiring. I really enjoyed the camaraderie that we shared and I learned a great deal more than I could have envisioned. Relating the unrelated may sound odd, but the notion speaks volumes about competence. For each class member I have a specific positive memory of our time shared. In no way am I attempting to put them in a box, as they are all unique individuals that possess multiple qualities, but these are the things that stood out to me: Silver, questioner; Cyan, nurturer; Kelly Green, free spirit; Khaki; fixer; Maroon, caretaker; Magenta, giver; Red, knightly; Lavender, spicy; Key Lime, fluid; Teal, singer; and Dorado, multidimensional. I will not elaborate on my designations, but can say that they are not based solely on first impressions, nor are they etched in stone. I feel very privileged to now know these people. In experiential erudition we have learned with and from each other, but more importantly, we bonded, which is something that I yearned for. As an adult distance education student living in Oregon, the Ireland travel course represented dormitory college life. Although only ten days in duration, we lived, cultured, and celebrated together.

## Conclusion

Traveling is definitely a process of attrition and I have learned a great deal by taking the Ireland travel course. Before departing for Ireland, I was able to better focus my writing on the first two questions of the Externship journal. While in Ireland, nothing compared to being in the moment, but that made writing more difficult for me. Going in, I understood that my normal schedule would be anything but. Being an early bird did not always mesh well with my night owl roommate, but I truly believe that both of us had a great time. In fact, I really got along with all of my classmates and am very thankful for the experience.

With my focus area being in social studies, the fields of history, culture, people, and arts interest me. Add to that the country of Ireland and my Irish heritage and you will see a hook, with attached line and sinker, pierced into the corner of my mouth. Tradition connects the past with the present and serves as a platform for enrichment. Just as I remember the experiences of my life in the hopes of improving, Irish mores procure advancement. History is much lived in Ireland and with each layer there are occurrences that not only change but remain familiar. Time and space are cultural, so in listening there are lessons to be heard. The seemingly unconnected connects everything in life. I understand that reinventing my learning style is a process, not a product. By dealing with ambiguity and variety, making sense of things, being creative with and sensitive to different perspectives, communicating, helping others, and building trust I can overcome most obstacles. In capturing individual balance, I will be a greater benefit to the world community. After all, we are all climbing the same hill, albeit from different sides.